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## COMMUNICATIONS

### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF "NEENAH"

I have noticed the inquiry of Mr. Harry F. Williams of Neenah<sup>1</sup> as to the meaning of the name "Neenah." It is to be observed that we all are inclined loosely to accept almost any interpretation of the Indian names which do so abound in Wisconsin, without investigation at the source, which is in this case the aboriginal people themselves who are still with us, speaking the tongues from which these names come.

It will be of some interest, no doubt, for me to give you the result of some inquiry of my own which reaches to the answer to the question of Mr. Williams. I spend many days each summer in the Keshena Reservation, peopled by the Menominee tribe. Last summer I found an old man, Peter Pamonik, who as a youth was familiar with the Neenah-Menasha region and its history, so far as the Indians knew it by tradition. He told me that Neenah was originally a Winnebago village and that its Winnebago name was "Wee-nah-pe-ko-ne." Beyond the fact that "Weenah" means "stinking" in the Winnebago tongue, he could not translate the name for me. This "Weenah," modified into "Neenah" by the whites, who also dropped the three closing syllables of the aboriginal name, appears in several Wisconsin names. Thus, we have Lake Winnebago, the towns of Winneconne and Winneboujou.

Of course all know that "Winnebago," or "Winnebagoshish," as it is in the original Indian, means "stinking water." This original Indian word in full is found in Minnesota, where a lake carries the name. "Winneconne" would seem to bear the earmarks of being originally the "Weenahpekone" which applied to the present city of Neenah. Of course the epithet "Neenah" grew out of the peculiar odor which comes from the water of Lake Winnebago and the slow water above it in the summer when it is filled with a growth of minute algae, often becoming very offensive.

<sup>1</sup> See the December, 1921, issue of this magazine, page 207.

The name "Menasha" applied in exactly that form to a Menominee village on the site of the present city, and merely means "island."

GEORGE Banta, *Menasha*